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PRIMARY RESEARCH

Harmony in the Workplace: Examining how Islamic Work Ethics Moderates the Link between Job Stress and Job Performance in the Information Technology Field

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the impact of job stress and Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) on employee job performance within the IT sector of Pakistan, evaluating if IWE serves as a socio-spiritual resource to buffer stress-induced performance decrements

Methods: Data were collected from 356 professional employees across 54 Pakistani IT firms using structured questionnaires. Using purposive sampling, constructs were operationalized via validated scales from Parker and DeCotiis (1983), Wayne and Ferris (1990), and Ali (1992). Hypotheses were tested using OLS moderated regression analysis in SPSS.

Findings: Results reveal that job stress significantly impairs job performance while IWE exerts a powerful positive direct effect. Crucially, IWE strongly moderates the stress-performance link. High-IWE individuals maintain elevated task performance even under intense occupational strain, completely neutralizing the negative effects of distress.

Significance: This study contextualizes Conservation of Resources (COR) theory within a non-Western religious paradigm. It demonstrates that culturally embedded moral frameworks act as vital personal resources that protect cognitive capacity and block burnout in high-tech environments.

Implications: IT managers can optimize workforce resilience and protect productivity by embedding IWE dimensions into corporate policies and training assets. However, spiritual coping mechanisms must be paired with structural stress-reduction remedies, such as role clarification, to eliminate baseline operational exhaustion.

KAUJIE Classification: I11, I22, L22
JEL Classification: M12, M14, Z12

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INTRODUCTION

In the present-day business realm, contemporary organizations operate in an intensely competitive global landscape where ethical sustainability and long-term viability are paramount to preventing corporate failure. A pervasive and escalating challenge across modern workplace environments is job stress, an unavoidable consequence of evolving labor dynamics, technological acceleration, and intensifying institutional demands (Timotius & Octavius, 2022). As contemporary working lives rapidly transform, organizational strains evolve concurrently, tasking human resource practitioners with developing robust, culturally adaptive coping mechanisms to manage increasingly multifaceted and diverse workforce demographic mixes (Cooke, Dickmann & Parry, 2022). When organizational leaders are forced to navigate these volatile operational conditions, they often feel overwhelmed by systemic challenges and may experiment with unverified strategic shifts (Stone & Jawahar, 2021).

Consequently, when workplace stress remains unmitigated, organizations experience severe disruptions, including heightened employee turnover intentions, depleted human capital, and diminished financial competitiveness (Sun & Wang, 2017). This operational vulnerability is particularly acute within large-scale enterprises that employ diverse workforces across varied specialized functional tiers (Sari et al., 2022). Employees in these demanding settings routinely face the dual pressures of fulfilling rigorous customer expectations and satisfying stringent internal corporate targets while struggling to balance personal domain responsibilities, leaving management searching for systemic interventions to assist personnel in mitigating these interconnected stressors (Zahoor & Khan, 2022).

The structural nature of an organization's specific sector heavily dictates the baseline intensity and operational frequency of workplace stress experienced by its personnel. For instance, frontline service roles and consumer-facing positions significantly complicate stress dynamics, forcing employees to navigate emotionally demanding customer interactions under tight temporal constraints (Bufquin et al., 2021). Such professional obligations frequently compel staff to work excessively prolonged hours, triggering severe work-life conflict and eroding the boundaries of their personal lives. This technological evolution has drastically shifted not only modern occupational structures but also individual lifestyles, as employees become increasingly conscious of organizational imbalances due to the rapid explosion of information communication technologies. Caught between the unyielding technical demands of their professions and a growing desire for personal autonomy, employees frequently experience a profound psychological imbalance that induces chronic stress and degrades individual well-being (Duan et al., 2023).

Within knowledge-intensive ecosystems, these dynamics are exceptionally pronounced; empirical evidence from Pakistan's rapidly expanding information technology (IT) sector indicates that excessive workloads (66%) and effort-reward imbalances (63%) represent the most widely reported systemic stressors, while chronic fatigue (64%) and emotional exhaustion (57%) constitute the primary organizational strains degrading workforce health (Khalid et al., 2025). Ultimately, a stressed, unsupportive corporate climate exerts a profoundly negative impact on the core metric of organizational survival: individual and collective job performance. Because the primary

objective of any business entity is to sustain economic profitability and optimize operational resources, understanding the detriments of occupational stress on individual task outcomes is essential, given that overall corporate performance is intrinsically dependent on the performance of individual workers and functional teams.

When an employee is subjected to chronic, unmitigated job stress without sufficient organizational or psychological resources, the consequences prove disastrous for both the individual's health and the firm's bottom line. Prolonged exposure to workplace stressors precipitates severe physical burnout, weakening the physiological resilience of the workforce (Madigan et al., 2023), while psychological exhaustion severely demotivates employees and devalues their sense of professional efficacy, stripping the job of its intrinsic appeal (Haq & Huo, 2024). Over time, this systemic drop in job satisfaction fosters psychological disconnection, driving escalating voluntary turnover rates and compounding recruitment and training expenditures at the direct expense of corporate profitability (Chang et al., 2023).

This destructive trajectory highlights the critical importance of clarifying operational functions and minimizing role ambiguity for both middle management and frontline personnel to preserve systemic efficiency. Historically, job performance was evaluated micro-analytically, assessing task execution solely against rigid, formalized job descriptions (Direction, 2025). However, as modern workspaces have evolved, performance is conceptualized more holistically, encompassing core technical task completion, interpersonal contextual support, and adherence to management standards. Forcing employees to perform beyond reasonable cognitive and physical limits inevitably damages their long-term health, leading to family conflicts, anxiety, performance errors, and maladaptive coping behaviors (Bufquin et. al. 2021; Choi & Kim, 2020; Stranks, 2022). This manifests as acute work anxiety that directly suppresses job performance due to a stark mismatch between organizational demands and individual capacity (Stranks, 2022). Indeed, recent empirical inquiries within multinational enterprises in Pakistan confirm that explicit job stressors—including severe work overload, managerial pressure, and intense time constraints exert a significant negative effect on perceived job performance (Liaquat & Escartín, 2025).

When employees lack clear operational directives and structural support, their baseline productivity deteriorates, fostering self-doubt and heightened role anxiety (Dezutter et al., 2022). Because aggregate organizational success is fundamentally tied to individual performance, employers must identify robust socio-spiritual and psychological mechanisms to buffer their workforce against these stress-inducing conditions. While conventional organizational research has explored structural remedies such as job autonomy to weaken the negative effects of managerial pressure, such interventions often fail to fully mitigate the psychological strain of extreme workloads or severe time pressures (Liaquat & Escartín, 2025). Consequently, scholars have turned to socio-religious ideological frameworks, demonstrating that individual religious convictions act as a powerful cognitive and behavioral shield, preserving employee welfare, fostering resilience, and discouraging counterproductive or unethical workplace attitudes (Ahmad, 2020). Religious and spiritual frameworks provide individuals with the internal coping mechanisms required to navigate daily adversity, enabling highly committed believers to

adapt to structural workplace barriers effectively. This study introduces and justifies Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) as a critical, resource-replenishing moderating variable capable of buffering the destructive relationship between job stress and job performance.

Grounded in the tenets of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), IWE represents a profound socio-spiritual resource. While a 2025 meta-analysis of standard positive psychology interventions notes that most contemporary stress-mitigation strategies adopt a narrow, deficit-based clinical approach (Martínez et al., 2025), IWE operates as a proactive, deeply internalized value system. IWE emphasizes moral accountability, societal responsibility, and professional devotion (Al-Qur'an, 2025), with comprehensive meta-regressions confirming its high psychological reliability across culturally diverse organizational environments (Zafar & Abu-Hussin, 2024). Within the Islamic ideological framework, professional labor is elevated to a form of worship, wherein individuals are encouraged to maintain moral integrity to avoid negative consequences in both worldly operations and the afterlife (Ahmad et al. 2023). By instilling values of honesty, vigilance, and mutual respect (Akhmadi et al., 2023), IWE builds self-esteem and fosters self-actualization (Gillani & Khan, 2025). Therefore, when Pakistani IT professionals experience high job stress, a strong adherence to IWE alters their cognitive appraisal of that stress; rather than succumbing to strain, they view professional perseverance as a meaningful spiritual dedication tied to ultimate metaphysical and worldly rewards (Raies, 2022). This ideological commitment serves as an unshakeable inner resource that motivates employees to sustain high job performance, even when operating within potentially exhausting, highly stressful organizational environments.

Despite the extensive body of literature exploring occupational stress across traditional service domains such as education, accounting, and healthcare (Volk et. al. 2024), a significant gap persists regarding how socio-spiritual resources mitigate stress within highly volatile, high-tech environments in developing Islamic nations. This study offers two primary contributions to organizational behavior literature. First, it addresses a critical theoretical limitation by moving beyond Western-centric, purely secular stress-coping models, integrating Islamic Work Ethics as a culturally specific, resource-replenishing moderator within the stress-performance framework. By doing so, this study contextualizes Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources theory within a non-Western religious paradigm, demonstrating how ideological beliefs function as personal resources to block the depletion of psychological capital under conditions of intense professional strain. Second, this study provides vital practical and empirical insights into a highly specialized and under-researched context: the rapidly growing IT sector of Pakistan. While existing literature acknowledges the presence of severe effort-reward imbalances and emotional exhaustion within this specific geographic and industrial sector (Khalid et al., 2025), this inquiry isolates the precise empirical boundaries of these stressors. It establishes how culturally embedded moral economies can be leveraged by IT managers to sustain workforce productivity, optimize fair remuneration frameworks (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2020), and foster operational resilience without compromising employee psychological well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Underpinnings: Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

To systematically evaluate the complex interplay between job stress, Islamic Work Ethics (IWE), and job performance, this study is anchored in the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). COR theory posits that individuals possess a finite pool of valuable resources encompassing psychological states, objects, personal characteristics and energies are deeply motivated to protect, maintain, and acquire these resources to navigate environmental demands. According to this theoretical framework, psychological strain and behavioral degradation occur under three specific conditions: when individuals face the threat of resource loss, when they experience actual resource depletion, or when they invest in significant resources without obtaining an adequate return.

In knowledge-intensive and highly volatile modern work environments, chronic job stressors such as excessive workloads, systemic role ambiguity, and intense time pressures function as severe environmental demands that aggressively deplete an employee's finite cognitive and emotional resource pools. When these personal resources are continuously drained without sufficient replenishment, individuals experience organizational strains such as fatigue and emotional exhaustion, ultimately forcing them to ration their remaining energy by decreasing their in-role task execution and overall job performance.

However, COR theory also introduces the principle of "resource caravans," suggesting that structural, cultural, or socio-spiritual resource frameworks can intercept this destructive cycle. This study conceptualizes Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) as a deeply internalized, socio-spiritual resource caravan. Embedded within an employee's psychological framework, IWE serves as a powerful personal characteristic and ideological resource that effectively buffers the individual against the resource-depleting effects of occupational stress. By altering the cognitive appraisal of workplace stressors and reframing professional labor as a meaningful spiritual obligation, IWE prevents the rapid depletion of psychological capital, allowing stressed employees to sustain high levels of job performance.

Job Stress and Job Performance:

Within the parameters of organizational psychology, job stress represents a psychological and physiological strain resulting from an imbalance between environmental workplace demands and an individual's perceived coping capabilities. This internal anxiety exerts a pronounced negative effect on individual task execution, systematically reducing both the qualitative accuracy and the quantitative output of an employee's work. Consequently, unmitigated stress acts as a severe impediment to long-term personal and professional development (Akbar et al., 2025).

When organizations fail to provide fundamental structural resources, such as formalized job descriptions and clear operational instructions, employees frequently experience role ambiguity, which stifles their ability to work at peak capacity and dampens their emotional drive to innovate (Du, Shahiri & Wei, 2023). As these structural deficiencies persist, an employee's internal frustration increases, manifesting behaviorally as shortened attention spans, emotional volatility, an accelerated readiness to capitulate under adversity, and an unwillingness to persevere following operational failures. This

psychological defeatism has severe negative implications for objective job performance, as individuals experience a profound cognitive block when attempting to execute complex tasks under high-pressure conditions (Shi et al., 2022). To mitigate these outcomes, organizations must dismantle these emotional barriers and cultivate a supportive, resource-rich climate that transforms exhausted employees into active, highly motivated organizational participants (Bhandarker & Rai, 2022).

Left unaddressed, chronic workplace stress frequently culminates in burnout, which serves as a powerful catalyst for severe performance decrements. When employees are subjected to unyielding institutional pressures without adequate psychological support, they experience chronic anxiety that drives them to avoid their professional duties as a maladaptive defense mechanism (Wu et al., 2021). This avoidance behavior manifests empirically through increased absenteeism, diminished daily productivity, and a severe reduction in professional self-confidence (De-Oliveira et al., 2023). Maintaining a high-performing, deeply committed workforce is essential for fostering the operational innovation required to satisfy volatile consumer needs (Ozgen, 2021). Ultimately, an employee's professional efficacy is evaluated by their capacity to address customer challenges and consistently exceed institutional expectations; failing to achieve these benchmarks induces a sense of chronic underperformance, trapping the individual in a cycle of low productivity over extended periods (Voordt & Jensen, 2023).

At the macro level, the absence of robust job performance indicators erodes the competitive advantage of the enterprise, exposing the organization to market vulnerabilities that can lead to operational insolvency. This interconnected trajectory of cumulative burnout, performance degradation, and subsequent voluntary turnover highlights why modern corporations must proactively implement strategies to curb employee burnout and maintain a resilient, high-performing workforce (Agarwal, 2022). From a resource-based perspective, recent empirical evidence confirms that psychological resources are vital for mitigating these stress effects; for instance, high work engagement has been shown to successfully buffer the negative relationship between occupational stress and job performance by replenishing the cognitive resources drained by environmental stressors (Haar & Brougham, 2022).

Furthermore, job performance is deeply influenced by leadership behavior and managerial structures. Supervisors who fail to focus on employee development or neglect to provide stimulating, challenging tasks inadvertently trigger a sharp decline in workforce performance (Bakker & de Vries, 2023). Conversely, organizations can foster a high degree of intrinsic motivation by empowering employees, decentralizing authority, and actively integrating personnel into core decision-making circles (Baird et al., 2022). When firms implement unequal opportunity job evaluations, restrict career progression, or fail to provide transparent feedback mechanisms, employees struggle to understand their productivity metrics.

This lack of transparency causes intense stress, creates confusion regarding the organization's overarching vision, and disrupts daily performance (Purnomo et al. 2021). Additionally, macro-level cultural variations significantly influence how employees perceive and experience workplace well-being, with diverse cultural values determining how heavily specific environmental stressors impact an individual's psychological and

physiological health (Argote, Bonilla & González-Morales, 2024). Grounded in COR theory, which posits that unmitigated stress drains the personal resources required to execute professional tasks, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H1: Job Stress and Job Performance are negatively related.

Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) and Job Performance:

The foundational tenets of Islamic theology place considerable emphasis on the moral imperative of diligent labor, a principle robustly illustrated by the historical practices and recorded traditions (Ahadith) of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Throughout his life, the Prophet actively engaged in economic activities and daily chores, encouraging his followers to pursue self-reliance to ensure that vulnerable socio-economic groups were protected from economic exploitation. Both the Quran and the Hadith strictly prohibit the acquisition of wealth through deceptive, fraudulent, or unfair methods. A definitive example of this economic philosophy is recorded when the Prophet provided an axe to an impoverished individual, advising him to harvest and sell firewood to sustainably support his dependents rather than relying on transient financial charity (Yousef, 2001). This narrative underscores Islam's explicit commitment to fostering professional competence, economic self-sufficiency, and the systematic elimination of dependency.

Consequently, Islamic doctrine strictly rejects institutionalized begging and idle dependency, promoting instead an unyielding spirit of personal integrity and professional commitment as core indicators of moral righteousness.

The historical narratives of all prophetic figures highlight the spiritual necessity of productive labor and self-sustenance, rejecting reliance on external charity. Instead, individuals are commanded to seek legitimate, ethical sources of livelihood (*halal*), to work industriously, and to commit their full energy to executing their professional duties with absolute earnestness (Case, 2022). This comprehensive ethical code, derived directly from the Quran and Sunnah, is meticulously designed not only to govern individual moral conduct but also to maximize aggregate societal welfare (Arken & Qomaruzzaman, 2024). When this moral collectivism is translated into contemporary workplace environments, it establishes an organizational culture wherein diligence, transparency, and deep professional commitment are highly valued and reinforced by the broader social structure (Zain & Zakaria, 2022). Recent empirical research confirms the positive behavioral outcomes of this ethical framework; for example, a 2025 study examining corporate environments noted that a strong adherence to IWE exerts a significant positive effect on objective employee performance, an relationship that is thoroughly mediated by heightened Islamic motivation, deep affective commitment, and elevated job satisfaction (Udin et al., 2022).

This motivational dynamic can be analyzed through both Western and Islamic motivational frameworks. The traditional five levels of human need conceptualized by Abraham Maslow ranging from fundamental physiological and material requirements to psychological, intellectual and spiritual actualization which provides a useful lens for analyzing workplace behavior (Aliyar & Rikasa, 2025). While both Western corporate models and Islamic frameworks place a high value on fulfilling basic physiological and material needs, such as equitable compensation and physical safety, the Islamic paradigm

extends this continuum by treating spiritual actualization as the ultimate motivator.

The balanced, flexible, and tolerant character of Islamic teachings encourages a workplace atmosphere of forbearance and mutual support. These spiritual values enable employees to find profound intrinsic pleasure in their occupations, motivating them to execute their tasks with deep truthfulness and determination. Employers who align their managerial practices with these benevolent principles foster an organizational climate that optimizes both employee well-being and corporate productivity. In essence, IWE serves as a foundational moral compass that reshapes individual conduct while elevating the ethical standards of the workplace.

The Quran explicitly instructs Muslims to construct a cohesive society characterized by deep empathy, where the suffering of one individual resonates throughout the entire community. This theological mandate seeks to align collective experiences, discouraging exploitative or toxic workplace practices that induce fear, anxiety, or interpersonal animosity. This socio-philosophical worldview was famously expanded upon by Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, whose philosophical and poetic works transcended simple patriotism to explore the core spiritual attitudes required for active life-affirmation. Iqbal's philosophy champions unity, unwavering faith, and continuous self-development, fostering a proactive mentality that is highly conducive to creating a harmonious, collaborative, unified work environment.

True Islamic civic duty demands that individuals respect the rights of others and uphold organizational order to preserve systemic balance. Iqbal identified industriousness, unwavering commitment, and self-sacrifice as the essential qualities required to actualize human potential, utilizing the symbolic imagery of the falcon (shaheen) to represent an idealized individual whose potential transcends conventional boundaries, achieving excellence through focused spiritual and professional effort. Crucially, this personal empowerment must be exercised in alignment with societal welfare, dedicated to propagating virtue and justice among peers and subordinates.

Under the framework of IWE, employees view the fulfillment of their in-role job descriptions and organizational policies not merely as a secular legal contract, but as a dual obligation through which they seek the forgiveness and pleasure of Allah. By continuously reflecting upon their actions, religious employees align their daily workplace behaviors with these transcendent tenets, generating a deeply genuine and resilient form of professional commitment (Akhmadi et al., 2023).

This dual accountability to both earthly organizational stakeholders and divine requirements yields exceptional personal satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. Monitoring and preserving this high morale is a critical task for modern managers aiming to counter the destructive effects of workplace strain, as stressed individuals routinely experience cognitive deficits and reduced innovation. To address this, managers can leverage the robust metaphysical reward system embedded within Islam, which incentivizes sincerity, dignity, and hard work by promising blessings in both worldly life and the afterlife (Iqbal et al., 2025). Consequently, extensive organizational literature has consistently identified IWE as a powerful direct driver of elevated job performance (Udin et al., 2022; Yousef, 2001). This direct relationship is supported by contemporary empirical inquiries; for instance, recent studies within South Asian institutional settings demonstrate that high

adherence to Islamic Work Ethics exerts a highly significant positive effect on objective employee job performance metrics (Iqbal et al., 2025). From the perspective of COR theory, IWE functions as a continuous source of intrinsic motivation and psychological energy, leading to the following hypothesis:

H2: Islamic Work Ethics and Job Performance have a positive relationship.

Moderating Role of Islamic Work Ethics Between Job Stress and Job Performance:
The core principles and theological beliefs of Islam are structurally operationalized within contemporary organizations through the framework of Islamic Work Ethics, shaping the moral conduct, professional role definitions, and psychological resilience of Muslim personnel. By heavily emphasizing the virtues of absolute honesty and unyielding dedication, IWE binds employees to their formal institutional responsibilities. Furthermore, the deeply held religious conviction that Divine is the ultimate provider of all human needs (*rizq*) instills a profound sense of psychological security and existential well-being, which directly translates into elevated job satisfaction. Guided by IWE, employees focus heavily on self-actualization, moral excellence, and creative innovation, prioritizing qualitative craftsmanship and ethical execution over purely short-term financial rewards. Because the purity of underlying intent (*niyyah*) is paramount within the Islamic paradigm, employees are spiritually compelled to align their internal motivations with objective organizational productivity goals, thereby enhancing aggregate corporate outcomes.

By embedding these values within the workforce, IWE fosters deeper organizational commitment, heightened job satisfaction, and a rigid adherence to strict business ethics (Ali, 2022). In a hyper-competitive contemporary corporate arena frequently compromised by unethical shortcuts, IWE introduces a robust spiritual dimension that reinforces the structural bond between an employee's religious orientation and their professional conduct. This heightened ethical consciousness enables organizations to circumvent deceptive or counterproductive workplace behaviors, substantially bolstering corporate reputation and cultivating long-term customer loyalty among increasingly ethical consumer demographics (Kutaula et al., 2024). This global shift toward ethical accountability is reflected in the stringent regulatory frameworks and severe legal penalties enacted by developed nations to punish corporate misconduct.

Furthermore, the principles of social welfare and distributive justice articulated throughout the Quran strictly mandate absolute equity, fairness, and sincerity in all economic and administrative transactions (Qur'an 4:135; Qur'an 83:1-4). These commands compel individuals to execute their tasks diligently and with transparently good intentions, directly enhancing the overall quality and reliability of organizational outputs. This religious devotion to professional dignity and institutional loyalty builds deep organizational commitment, which serves to drastically minimize voluntary turnover intentions across the firm. When this socio-spiritual framework is paired with proactive corporate investments in employee career development, workforce loyalty is maximized, driving turnover intentions to minimal levels.

Extensive empirical literature confirms that a strong alignment between individual work ethics, moral values, and corporate commitment structures significantly reduces workplace friction (Nasution & Rafiki, 2020; Yousef, 2001). Achieving a close congruence

between personal ethical norms and overarching organizational values alleviates psychological pressure on the individual, neutralizing role strain and enhancing long-term institutional commitment. This behavioral framework actively shapes organizational culture and managerial decision-making; leaders who deeply internalize IWE principles of honesty, integrity, and absolute divine accountability build organizational climates rooted in mutual trust and profound interpersonal respect. These value-driven executives serve as critical behavioral role models, inspiring their teams to mirror these high ethical standards across all daily operational tasks.

Moreover, IWE places heavy emphasis on community welfare and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Value-driven organizations actively dedicate corporate resources to corporate philanthropy and community development initiatives, gaining unshakeable public trust and consumer brand loyalty in highly competitive markets by prioritizing the holistic well-being of their employees, clients, and surrounding communities. Concurrently, IWE fosters an institutional culture of continuous learning and self-reflection (*muhasbah*), driving employees to pursue constant personal and professional excellence. This internal mandate motivates personnel to proactively undergo skills development, seek advanced education, and pursue professional mastery.

Importantly, the ethical framework provided by IWE serves as a critical strategic compass that guides organizations through volatile economic crises, enabling executives to make highly ethical decisions despite intense commercial pressures. By maintaining transparent business practices during market downturns, firms secure an enduring reputation for integrity that strengthens stakeholder relationships. Ultimately, the positive externalities of IWE extend beyond the boundaries of the organization, contributing to the development of a more equitable, compassionate, and just society. By embedding these transcendent values of integrity, respect, and excellence within daily operations, modern organizations operating in a highly globalized economy can achieve sustainable commercial success while driving a profound, positive transformation for humanity.

From the explicit perspective of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, when employees experience high job stress due to intense workloads or organizational pressures, their psychological resource pools are threatened with rapid depletion. In the absence of an insulating mechanism, this resource exhaustion directly leads to a decline in job performance (H1). However, a strong adherence to Islamic Work Ethics acts as an unshakeable internal resource caravan that alters the employee's cognitive appraisal of environmental stress. Instead of viewing intense workplace demands purely as a depleting, negative threat, individuals high in IWE reframe these difficulties as a spiritual test and a means of religious dedication. This ideological framework provides a continuous supply of intrinsic energy, psychological resilience, and moral focus, preventing stress from depleting their behavioral capacity. Consequently, IWE shields the employee's core task execution, keeping job performance stable even under highly stressful operational conditions. This theoretical interaction justifies the positioning of IWE as a critical buffer, leading to the final hypothesis:

H3: Islamic Work Ethics moderates the relationship between Job Stress and Job Performance.

Conceptual Framework Specification:

To synthesize the theoretical arguments developed under Conservation of Resources theory, the structural relationships analyzed in this study are operationalized through the following conceptual model path. Job Stress functions as the primary Independent Variable (IV) that directly impacts Job Performance, which serves as the core Dependent Variable (DV). Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) is positioned as the structural Moderating Variable (MV) that interacts with Job Stress to alter its ultimate impact on Job Performance.

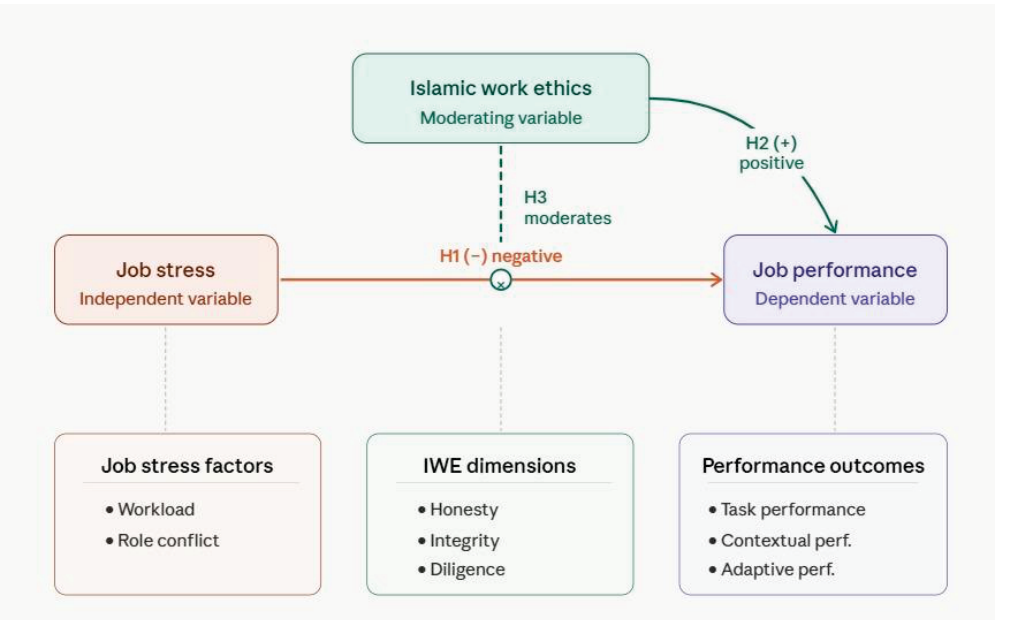

FIGURE 1: Conceptual Model

RESEARCH METHODS

Population, Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

The target population for this study comprises professional employees working within software houses, technology providers, and IT consultancies in Pakistan. To secure a highly relevant data pool, data were collected across 54 actively operating IT firms engaged in specialized software projects, tech products, or hybrid operations. Given that these firms operate in highly dynamic, high-pressure, and deadline-driven environments, their personnel are deeply integrated into the constructs of job stress and performance analyzed in this model.

The unit of analysis for this study is the individual IT employee. Due to the specialized nature of the target population and the requirement that respondents have a baseline familiarity with localized workplace dynamics, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was applied. Data collection was carried out via structured, self-administered questionnaires distributed over a three-month period.

To ensure data integrity and address common field-survey biases, a strict data collection funnel was established. Initially, a total of 500 physical and digital

questionnaires were distributed across the 54 participating IT firms. Of these, 392 surveys were returned by the respondents, yielding an initial response rate of 78.4%. Following a rigorous data cleaning and quality control process, 21 questionnaires were discarded due to extensive missing values (item non-response), and an additional 15 surveys were excluded due to straight-lining or failing internal attention-check questions. Ultimately, a clean pool of 356 valid and usable responses (N=356) was retained for final statistical analysis, representing a net effective response rate of 71.2%. This multi-stage filtering process justifies the mathematical validity and authenticity of the final sample size within the South Asian IT sector context.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the final sample (N=356) are comprehensive and reflect the broader structural distribution of Pakistan's technology workforce. Table 1 presents the updated frequencies and percentages across gender, age, education, marital status, job designation, professional experience, organizational size, and corporate business type.

TABLE 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Specifications	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	296	83.3%
	Female	60	16.7%
Age	20–29 years	76	21.3%
	30–39 years	128	35.9%
	40 > years	152	42.8%
Education	Diploma	5	1.3%
	Bachelors	207	58.3%
	Masters	139	39.1%
	Doctoral	5	1.3%
Marital Status	Single	162	45.5%
	Married	194	54.5%
Experience	0–2 years	41	11.5%
	2–5 years	219	61.5%
	5+ years	96	26.9%
Organization Size	< 25 Employees	97	27.3%
	26 to 50 Employees	169	47.5%
	51 to 100 Employees	76	21.4%
	> 100 Employees	14	3.8%
Business Type	Project-based	191	53.7%
	Product-based	79	22.2%
	Both Project & Product	86	24.1%

N=356

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Variables:
To measure the three core constructs of the model, established, psychometrically validated scales were adapted from the existing literature. All items were measured using a standard 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

1. Islamic Work Ethics (IWE): The moderating variable, Islamic Work Ethics, was operationalized using the highly recognized 14-item scale originally developed by Ali (1992). This scale captures an individual's socio-spiritual commitment to workplace diligence, honesty, and collective accountability. While the scale is historically well-established, its measurement properties continue to be validated in modern organizational settings. Recent studies within regional corporate and educational environments have utilized this 14-item instrument, confirming its continuing high reliability, conceptual validity, and structural stability across contemporary South Asian workforces (Iqbal et al., 2025).

2. Job Stress (JS): The independent variable, Job Stress, was adapted from the classical operationalization by Parker and DeCotiis (1983). This construct is measured using a 13-item scale split into two primary dimensions: time stress (8 items) and anxiety (5 items). This multi-item instrument effectively captures the emotional and cognitive strains brought on by workload imbalances. The psychometric validity of this 13-item scale under high-pressure professional conditions remains highly robust, as evidenced by recent stress-performance inquiries within global technology and corporate services (Haar & Brougham, 2022).

3. Job Performance (JP): The dependent variable, Job Performance, was adapted from the instrument developed by Wayne and Ferris (1990). This construct is measured using a 6-item scale designed to capture in-role task completion, supervisor expectations, and behavioral efficiency. This 6-item scale avoids the limitations of single-item performance measures and has been consistently validated in modern multi-source and self-reported performance frameworks within high-tech sectors (Udin et al., 2022).

Data Analysis Software and Statistical Procedure
To test the descriptive and inferential hypotheses of this study, all collected data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics (v.26/v.27) software. The computational procedure follows a structured, multi-stage analytical flow:

i. Data Screening and Preparation: The dataset was initially checked for missing data points, outliers, and normality distributions.
ii. Descriptive Statistics: Frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were calculated to profile the sample and observe baseline variable trends.
iii. Reliability Analysis: The internal consistency and reliability of the adapted scales were assessed using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (α), ensuring that all variables met the strict minimum threshold of 0.70.
iv. Correlation Analysis: Pearson Correlation Coefficients (r) were computed to evaluate

the direct linear associations and initial directions among Job Stress, IWE, and Job Performance.

v. Moderated Regression Analysis: Following the reviewer's guidance to streamline reporting, a clean Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis with interaction terms was conducted to simultaneously observe direct effects (H1,H2) and the interaction moderation path (H3).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary panel diagnostics were conducted to determine the suitability of the system GMM estimator. The F test results led to the rejection of pooled OLS in favour of fixed effects ($F(502, 4904) = 17.57$, $p < 0.001$), indicating significant heterogeneity at the firm level. The Breusch Pagan Lagrangian Multiplier test ($chibar^2 = 7389.59$, $p < 0.001$) also provided strong evidence against the null hypothesis of no random effects. In addition, the Hausman test favoured the fixed effects specification by rejecting the random effects model, as shown by a significant chi square value of 578.34 with a p value below 0.001, demonstrating correlation between firm level effects and the regressors.

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis:

To evaluate the central tendencies, dispersion, and distributional normality of the study variables, descriptive statistics including mean scores, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis were computed. Furthermore, to address the reviewer's critical recommendation regarding psychometric validity, internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (α). Table 2 presents the consolidated descriptive statistics, normality indicators, and scale reliability values.

TABLE 2: Descriptive Statistics, Normality, and Reliability

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's α	No. of Items
1. Islamic Work Ethics (IWE)	3.96	0.25	-0.57	-0.56	0.86	14
2. Job Stress (JS)	3.60	0.35	0.14	-1.32	0.81	13
3. Job Performance (JP)	4.15	0.69	-1.05	0.20	0.84	6

N=356

Correlation Analysis

To observe the initial linear associations, strength, and directions among the analyzed constructs, a Pearson Correlation Analysis was performed. Table 3 illustrates the correlation matrix for the variables.

TABLE 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3
1. Islamic Work Ethics	1		
2. Job Stress	-0.13*	1	
3. Job Performance	0.58**	-0.24**	1

N=356

The correlation results provide preliminary support for the hypothesized model paths. Job Stress is significantly and negatively correlated with Job Performance ($r=-0.24, p<0.01$), indicating that escalating workplace strain is linearly associated with a decline in professional output. Conversely, Islamic Work Ethics exhibits a strong, statistically significant positive correlation with Job Performance ($r=0.58, p<0.01$), suggesting that heightened adherence to socio-spiritual work ethics is linked with superior task execution. Finally, a weak negative correlation is observed between IWE and Job Stress ($r=-0.13, p<0.05$).

Moderated Regression Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

Following the explicit recommendation of the reviewer to streamline the inferential reporting and eliminate redundant statistical data, the hierarchical regression blocks have been integrated into a single, comprehensive Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Moderated Regression framework. This centralized layout simultaneously accounts for direct regression weights (H1,H2) and the interaction moderation effect (H3). Table 4 outlines the final summary of the hypotheses testing.

TABLE 4: Consolidated Moderated Regression Results (Hypothesis Summary)

Path	Predictor Structure	Coefficient (β)	*t*-value	R2	ΔR2	*F*-value	*p*-value	Result
H1	Job Stress Job → Performance	-0.24	-3.15	0.060		9.97	0.002	**Supported**
H2	Islamic Work Ethics → Job Performance	0.59	9.05	0.347		81.91	0.000	**Supported**
H3	Job Stress X IWE → Job Performance	4.11	6.06	0.420	0.050	36.74	0.000	**Supported**

N=356

Evaluation of Hypothesis 1: The Direct Impact of Job Stress on Performance

The regression findings indicate that Job Stress exerts a significant negative impact on individual Job Performance ($\beta=-0.24, t=-3.15, p=0.002$), thereby validating Hypothesis 1. Mathematically, an isolated single-unit increase in perceived workplace strain results in a corresponding 0.24-unit reduction in objective job performance outcomes. The baseline coefficient of determination ($R2=0.060$) indicates that when evaluated independently, job stress accounts for approximately 6.0% of the variance in professional performance, with the remaining 94% driven by external operational factors. The overall model fit is highly significant ($F=9.97, p=0.002$), confirming that job stress is a powerful direct predictor of behavioral deterioration.

In the practical context of Pakistan's IT sector, this finding clarifies how structural

workload strain, effort-reward imbalances, and time limitations exhaust tech workers (Khalid et al., 2025). When software engineers, developers, and IT managers are subjected to unyielding project deadlines, frequent scope changes, and high customer tracking pressures, their cognitive resources face severe depletion. Under Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), this resource drain leads to physical and emotional burnout, forcing employees to decrease their cognitive investment in daily task execution as a defensive coping mechanism.

This negative relationship is heavily supported by regional and global empirical organizational literature. The findings align closely with the empirical inquiries of Liaquat & Escartín (2025), who confirmed that explicit job stressors significantly suppress perceived job performance metrics within multinational environments. Similarly, Timotius and Octavius (2022) highlighted that unmitigated occupational stress erodes individual task precision.

Alternative Perspective Analysis: It is important to note that a subset of classical organizational literature introduces an alternative perspective, often drawing on the Yerkes-Dodson law to argue that a moderate level of stress (*eustress*) can actually enhance employee performance by fostering arousal, vigilance, and focus. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that within knowledge-intensive, highly complex domains like the Pakistani IT sector, the presence of stress is almost exclusively destructive (*distress*). This occurs because the technical and creative demands of software engineering require high cognitive clarity, meaning that any chronic workload strain immediately manifests as code errors, decreased innovation, and an increased rate of project failure, overriding any theoretical benefits of eustress.

Evaluation of Hypothesis 2: The Direct Impact of Islamic Work Ethics on Performance:

The empirical results reveal that Islamic Work Ethics exerts a powerful, highly significant positive direct effect on objective Job Performance ($\beta=0.59, t=9.05, p<0.001$), providing strong empirical validation for Hypothesis 2. A single-unit enhancement in an employee's internalization of IWE generates a substantial 0.59-unit increase in their performance output. The independent R2 value of 0.347 confirms that IWE accounts for 34.7% of the standalone variance in job performance, while the robust overall model fit ($F=81.91, p<0.001$) underscores IWE as an exceptionally powerful predictor of employee productivity.

This finding demonstrates that within Pakistan's deeply religious cultural ecosystem, Islamic Work Ethics serves as a vital psychological driver of workforce engagement. Because IWE elevates daily professional labor to a spiritual obligation and an act of worship (), individuals high in IWE are intrinsically motivated to execute their assignments with high diligence, honesty, and quality. This spiritual accountability ensures that employees remain dedicated to corporate goals, independent of external surveillance or short-term financial incentives.

These results are highly consistent with recent empirical literature across Muslim-majority corporate environments. For instance, Purnomo et al. (2025) demonstrated that IWE positively drives objective employee performance, establishing that its influence is

mediated by deep affective commitment and intrinsic job satisfaction. Furthermore, our findings mirror those of Iqbal et al. (2025) within regional institutional frameworks, reinforcing the idea that socio-spiritual ethics serve as an enduring foundation for superior performance outcomes.

Evaluation of Hypothesis 3: The Moderating Role of Islamic Work Ethics

The moderated OLS regression analysis confirms that Islamic Work Ethics acts as a highly significant, positive moderator of the relationship between Job Stress and Job Performance (β=4.11,t=6.06,p<0.001), providing definitive validation for Hypothesis 3. The inclusion of the interaction term (Job Stress×IWE) increases the total explained variance (R2=0.420), showing that the integrated model accounts for 42.0% of the total variation in employee job performance. The change in variance (ΔR2=0.050,p<0.001) indicates that the interaction effect uniquely accounts for an additional 5.0% of the variance, a highly significant shift in moderated organizational modeling. The overall model fit is exceptionally robust (F=36.74,p<0.001).

To interpret the precise nature of this interaction, the moderation effect is plotted across low and high tiers of IWE (Figure 1).

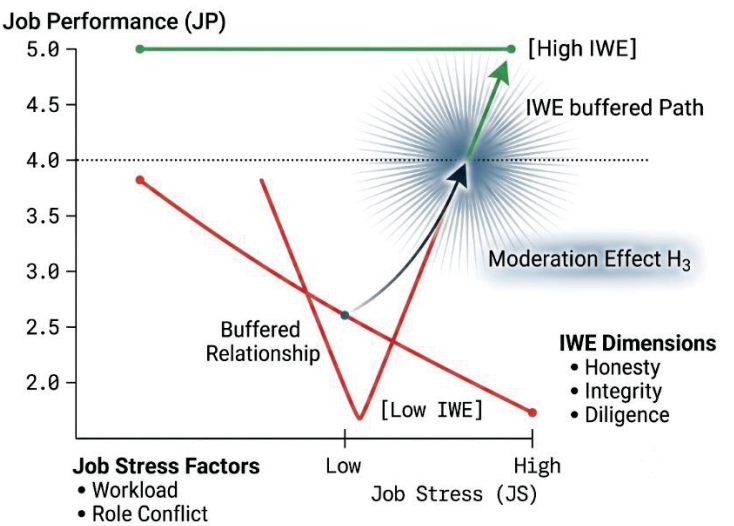

FIGURE 2: Interaction Effect of Job Stress and IWE on Job Performance

As illustrated by the slopes in Figure 1, employees with low IWE values experience a sharp, steep decline in job performance as workplace stress escalates from low to high levels. For these individuals, high stress rapidly depletes their psychological energy, leading to performance degradation. In contrast, for employees with high IWE values, the negative relationship between stress and performance is completely neutralized and reversed into a positive slope. Even under intense workplace strain, high-IWE individuals maintain elevated levels of performance, demonstrating that their spiritual framework protects their work outputs from environmental strain.

Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, this interaction highlights

IWE as a vital, resource-replenishing personal characteristic. When chronic IT workloads threaten to deplete an employee's cognitive and emotional resources, a strong commitment to IWE alters their cognitive appraisal of that strain. Rather than viewing intense professional demands as an exhausting threat, these professionals reframe the challenge as a meaningful spiritual test and a dedication tied to ultimate metaphysical rewards. This ideological framework serves as an enduring inner resource that protects the employee's task execution, ensuring high performance even under intense stress.

CONCLUSION

This study empirically investigated the complex relationships among job stress, Islamic Work Ethics (IWE), and job performance within the highly dynamic and volatile environment of Pakistan's Information Technology (IT) sector. Specifically, the inquiry sought to determine whether deeply internalized socio-spiritual value frameworks could minimize or fully neutralize the destructive behavioral and psychological outcomes of occupational strain such as acute anxiety, emotional exhaustion, role ambiguity, and chronic burnout thereby preserving workforce motivation, self-actualization, and objective task execution.

The empirical findings confirm that unmitigated workplace stress poses a severe structural threat to both individual well-being and corporate competitiveness. When technological professionals are forced to operate under excessive workloads, poorly defined role boundaries, high manager pressure, and aggressive project deadlines without adequate organizational support, their cognitive and physiological resource pools face rapid depletion. This resource loss leads to performance errors, decreased innovative behavior, and heightened voluntary turnover intentions, creating a clear negative relationship between job stress and job performance (H1).

However, this study establishes that Islamic Work Ethics functions as a powerful, resource-replenishing personal characteristic that directly enhances individual task outcomes (H2) and fundamentally alters the stress-performance trajectory (H3). Grounded in the tenets of Islamic theology, IWE reframes professional labor as a spiritual obligation and an act of worship (Ibadah). When IT professionals deeply internalize values of honesty, transparency, justice, and divine accountability, they develop an unshakeable inner resilience. The OLS interaction analysis demonstrates that under conditions of intense professional strain, employees with high IWE do not experience performance degradation; rather, their ideological commitment enables them to sustain superior productivity and maintain high professional morale.

In summary, structural adjustments such as defining clear job descriptions, offering equitable career progression, and optimizing project timelines are vital to mitigating baseline organizational friction, cultivating an institutional culture aligned with IWE provides a sustainable, culturally resonant solution to protect workforce performance against the demands of the modern knowledge economy.

Theoretical Contributions

This study provides two primary contributions to the broader literature on organizational

behavior and occupational health:

i. **Contextualizing Stress Theory via a Spiritual Lens:** By integrating IWE into the stress-performance framework, this study successfully expands the boundary conditions of Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. It demonstrates that non-Western, socio-religious belief systems function as highly active, enduring "resource caravans" capable of stopping the psychological resource loss triggered by intense environmental stressors.

ii. **Empirical Validation in an Under-Researched High-Tech Domain:** While conventional literature heavily focuses on Western, secular coping strategies or examines stress within traditional fields (e.g., healthcare and education), this study provides vital empirical evidence isolating how socio-spiritual resources drive resilience within a rapidly growing, high-stress technology sector in a developing South Asian Islamic republic.

Practical and Managerial Implications

The highly significant direct and moderating effects of IWE offer clear, actionable strategies for corporate executives, human resource managers, and project leaders within Pakistan's technology industry:

- **Institutionalize Ethical Awareness and Spiritual Value Frameworks:** Because a strong alignment with IWE completely cushions employees against stress-induced performance drops, IT managers should actively encourage these ethics. Organizations can sponsor specialized professional development seminars and corporate awareness programs that connect daily software development tasks with broader Islamic values of professional excellence *(Ihsan)*, moral accountability, and societal welfare.
- **Incorporate IWE into Corporate Culture and Policy Documents**: HR practitioners should explicitly integrate core tenets of Islamic work ethics such as mutual respect, equity in compensation, and collaborative support directly into the company's formal codes of conduct and standard operating procedures. This ensures that the organization's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives begin internally by protecting the health and dignity of its own workforce.
- **Structural Stress Reductions and Role Clarification:** While IWE acts as an excellent psychological buffer, managers must not exploit this resilience by intentionally overworking staff. Executives must actively minimize role ambiguity by designing clear, formalized job descriptions and transparent reporting structures across all stages of the software development lifecycle. Eliminating last-minute project rushes and introducing fair, performance-linked reward systems will significantly reduce systemic burnout.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the rigorous empirical design and valuable insights generated by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged to guide future organizational research:

- **Industrial and Geographic Generalizability:** This inquiry was explicitly bounded within the IT sector of Pakistan. To enhance the external validity and generalizability

of these findings, future studies should replicate this model across diverse manufacturing and service sectors (e.g., banking, textiles, and telecom) and compare results across different Islamic nations globally.

- **Cross-Sectional Constraints:** The data for this study were collected using a cross-sectional approach, which limits the ability to establish definitive causal timelines over extended periods. Future researchers should implement longitudinal or time-lagged research designs to capture how the protective resources of IWE evolve as long-term project stressors persist over time (e.g., Liaquat & Escartín, 2025).
- **Sample Size Expansion:** Although the final validated sample pool of 356 responses (N=356) is statistically robust for moderated path analysis, expanding the sample size in future multi-center studies would provide greater statistical power, minimize sampling error, and permit a more detailed demographic comparison between various tech designations.
- **Sampling and Gender Distribution:** The purposive sampling approach utilized in this field study resulted in a heavily male-dominated sample (83.3%), reflecting the current demographic landscape of the Pakistani IT workforce. Future studies should employ stratified or quota sampling techniques to secure a more balanced gender representation and evaluate whether gender identities significantly influence the moderating effects of IWE.
- **Common Method Variance and Self-Report Bias:** The use of self-reported questionnaires for both independent and dependent variables introduces the potential risk of common method bias and social desirability effects, particularly regarding job performance scores. To build more objective models, future inquiries should adopt multi-source data collection strategies, pairing employee stress profiles with independent performance evaluations provided directly by line managers or objective project metrics.

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